CLAIMS

1. A method for managing interruptions to a network user, the interruptions being generated by a plurality of senders on a network, the network user having a permanent reception list the method comprising:

modifying a temporary reception list in response to one of a retrospective activity and a prospective activity;

receiving an interruption from one of the senders on the network;

presenting the interruption to the network user if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the one of the senders on the network.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein modifying the temporary reception list comprises adding an entry to the temporary reception list upon a determination the time until the occurrence of the prospective activity is less than a predetermined time.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein modifying the temporary reception list comprises removing an entry from the temporary reception list upon a determination that the age of the retrospective activity exceeds a predetermined time.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the retrospective and prospective activities comprise calendar-based entries established by the user.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of presenting the interruption further comprises:

receiving an urgency value associated with the interruption;

comparing the urgency value with an interruption threshold value defined by the network user; and

presenting the interruption to the network user if the urgency value exceeds the threshold value.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving a user status request from one of the senders;

generating a generic status message if the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list do not include an entry associated with the sender of the user status request; and

generating a customized status message if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the sender of the user status request.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein presenting the interruption comprises presenting an alert to the network user if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the one of the senders.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the alert comprises a signal that an interruption has been requested, and at least one portion of an initial message from one of the senders and an identification of the at least one of the senders is stored in a table for inspection by the user.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the alert comprises at least one of a portion of an initial message from the one of the senders and an identification of the one of the senders.

10. The method of claim 7 further comprising providing expanded information for the one of the senders to the network user in response to a user request.

11. A computer program product for use with a computer system, the computer program product comprising a computer useable medium having embodied therein program code comprising:

program code for modifying a temporary reception list of a network user in response to one of a retrospective activity and a prospective activity;

program code for receiving an interruption from a sender on the network; and

program code for presenting the interruption to the network user if one of the temporary reception list and a permanent reception list of the network user includes an entry associated with the sender.

12. The computer program product of claim 11 wherein the program code for modifying a temporary reception list further comprises program code for adding an entry to the temporary reception list upon a determination the time until the occurrence of the prospective activity is less than a predetermined time.

13. The computer program product of claim 11 wherein the program code for modifying a temporary reception list further comprises program code for adding an entry to the temporary reception list upon a determination that the time since the occurrence of the retrospective activity is less than a predetermined time.

14. The computer program product of claim 11 wherein the program code for modifying a temporary reception list further comprises program code for removing an entry from the temporary reception list upon a determination that the age of the retrospective activity exceeds a predetermined time.

15. The computer program product of claim 11 wherein the program code for presenting the interruption further comprises:

program code for receiving an urgency value associated with the interruption;

program code for comparing the urgency value with an interruption threshold value defined by the network user; and

program code for presenting the interruption to the network user if the urgency value exceeds the threshold value.

16. The computer program product of claim 11 further comprising:

program code for receiving a user status request from a status requestor;

program code for generating a generic status message if the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list do not include an entry associated with the status requestor; and

program code for generating a customized status message if one of the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list includes an entry associated with the status requestor.

17. The computer program product of claim 11 wherein the program code for presenting the interruption comprises program code for presenting an alert to the network user if one of the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list includes an entry associated with the sender, the alert comprising at least one of a portion of an initial message from the sender and an identification of the sender.

18. The computer program product of claim 17 further comprising program code for providing expanded information about the sender to the network user in response to a user request.

19. A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave for use with a computer system having a display and capable of generating a user interface through which a user may interact with the computer system, the computer data signal comprising:

program code for modifying a temporary reception list of a network user in response to one of a retrospective activity and a prospective activity;

program code for receiving an interruption from a sender on the network; and

program code for presenting the interruption to the network user if one of the temporary reception list and a permanent reception list of the network user includes an entry associated with the sender.

20. The computer data signal of claim 19 wherein the program code for modifying a temporary reception list further comprises program code for adding an entry to the temporary reception list upon a determination the time until the occurrence of the prospective activity is less than a predetermined time.

21. The computer data signal of claim 19 wherein the program code for modifying a temporary reception list further comprises program code for removing an entry from the temporary reception list upon a determination that the age of the retrospective activity exceeds a predetermined time.

22. The computer data signal of claim 19 wherein the program code for presenting the interruption further comprises:

program code for receiving an urgency value associated with the interruption;

program code for comparing the urgency value with an interruption threshold value defined by the network user; and

program code for presenting the interruption to the network user if the urgency value exceeds the threshold value.

23. The computer data signal of claim 19 further comprising:

program code for receiving a user status request from a status requestor;

program code for generating a generic status message if the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list do not include an entry associated with the status requestor; and

program code for generating a customized status message if one of the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list includes an entry associated with the status requestor.

24. The computer data signal of claim 19 wherein the program code for presenting the interruption comprises program code for presenting an alert to the network user if one of the temporary reception list and the permanent reception list includes an entry associated with the sender, the alert comprising at least one of a portion of an initial message from the sender and an identification of the sender.

25. The computer data signal of claim 24 further comprising program code for providing expanded information about the sender to the network user in response to a user request.

26. A computing system comprising:

a display screen;

a user input device; and

a processor executing a network user communications program to manage interruptions to a network user, the interruptions being generated by a plurality of senders on a network, wherein each interruption is presented to the network user on the display screen if one of a permanent reception list and a temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the respective sender.

27. An apparatus for managing interruptions to a network user, the interruptions being generated by a plurality of senders on a network, the network user having a permanent reception list, the apparatus comprising:

means for modifying a temporary reception list in response to one of a retrospective activity and a prospective activity;

means for receiving an interruption from one of the senders on the network;

means for presenting the interruption to the network user if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the one of the senders on the network.

28. The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the means for modifying the temporary reception list comprises means for adding an entry to the temporary reception list upon a determination the time until the occurrence of the prospective activity is less than a predetermined time.

29. The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the means for modifying the temporary reception list comprises means for removing an entry from the temporary reception list upon a determination that the age of the retrospective activity exceeds a predetermined time.

30. The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the means for presenting the interruption further comprises:

means for receiving an urgency value associated with the interruption;

means for comparing the urgency value with an interruption threshold value defined by the network user; and

means for presenting the interruption to the network user if the urgency value exceeds the interruption threshold value.

31. The apparatus of claim 27 further comprising:

means for receiving a user status request from one of the senders;

means for generating a generic status message if the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list do not include an entry associated with the sender of the user status request; and

means for generating a customized status message if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the sender of the user status request.

32. The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the means for presenting the interruption comprises presenting an alert to the network user if one of the permanent reception list and the temporary reception list includes an entry associated with the one of the senders, the alert comprising at least one of a portion of an initial message from the one of the senders and an identification of the one of the senders.

33. The apparatus of claim 32 further comprising means for providing expanded information for the one of the senders to the network user in response to a user request.